

2 FAH-3 H-100 STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR THE VITAL PRESENCE VALIDATION PROCESS

2 FAH-3 H-110 PROCEDURES

*(CT:VPP-1; 05-19-2015)
(Office of Origin: M/PRI)*

2 FAH-3 H-111 GENERAL

(CT:VPP-1; 05-19-2015)

The Vital Presence Validation Process (VP2) was approved by the Secretary of State on April 28, 2014. VP2 is an institutionalized, repeatable, transparent, and corporate process to make risk-managed decisions regarding the U.S. presence at high-threat locations, including whether to begin, restart, continue, reconsider the personnel footprint, or discontinue operations. This process must take place annually for all posts on the High-Threat, High-Risk post (HTHR) list, but may also take place on an ad hoc basis. See 12 FAM 490 for more information on the HTHR list.

2 FAH-3 H-112 PURPOSE OF VP2

(CT:VPP-1; 05-19-2015)

A VP2 analysis must articulate that the Department has

- (1) Developed a defined, attainable, and prioritized mission based on U.S. national interests;
- (2) Undertaken an assessment of the risk (e.g., potential for significant loss of life, property or national capability occurring as a result of an act or acts of terrorism or political violence directed against a U.S. mission presence) and resources needed to mitigate risk to the maximum extent possible;
- (3) Explicitly accepted those risks that cannot be mitigated;
- (4) Developed recommended conditions for the U.S. government presence in

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this location, including an identification of residual risks and highlighting any gaps; and

- (5) Weighed the needs of U.S. policy against the risks facing U.S. personnel, and considered whether adjustments to the U.S. presence must be made.

2 FAH-3 H-113 PROCESS INITIATION

(CT:VPP-1; 05-19-2015)

- a. **Initiators that begin the VP2 process:** A VP2 process will be conducted for all posts on the annual High Threat/High Risk list, as determined by the High Threat/High Risk post designation process. An ad hoc VP2 can also be requested by the Tripwire Committee, a regional bureau, 7th floor staff, or the NSC or outside agencies. Reasons for an ad hoc review could include a deteriorating security situation, or a policy decision that causes the department to reconsider presence. The result is a yearly or ad hoc decision memo that articulates whether the department should continue, begin, or restart operations at a given post. Customers of the VP2 process include the NSC/White House, the regional bureau, and the Secretary.
- b. VP2 is distinct from but complementary to Rightsizing and to Crisis Management. Rightsizing determines the optimal level of all personnel overseas under Chief of Mission authority. Crisis Management is both a rapid response to specific, ephemeral events, and an ongoing activity that includes crisis preparedness, risk assessment, and crisis response. A VP2 analysis weighs U.S. policy against risks in a particular location, taking staffing and resources into account.
- c. **Authority:** The Deputy Secretaries of State and Under Secretaries for Political Affairs and Management will decide whether to begin, restart, continue, reconsider the personnel footprint, or discontinue operations at a post. The Deputies and Under Secretaries must be prepared to accept the risks associated with operating in this location. Following their decision, the Deputies and Under Secretaries may request the Regional Bureau to revisit the recommendation at a later date of their choosing (e.g., in six months, or sooner, if desired). In cases where consensus cannot be reached, the Secretary of State will decide.
- d. **Timing and Responsibilities:** Following the release of the annual HTHR post list, the Regional Bureau must complete the VP2 for each post on the HTHR list. The VP2 template is available on the VP2 SharePoint site. The Regional Bureau and Post will determine which post programs are vital in terms of U.S. national interests before the Regional Bureau engages with other Department bureaus to compile the discussion template. The functional bureaus, such as DS and OBO, will base their entries in the VP2 discussion template on which resources and capabilities are necessary to support those vital interests.

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- e. **Schedule and Kickoff Meeting:** Following the release of the HTHR post list each year, the Office of Management Policy, Rightsizing, and Innovation (M/PRI) will create and publish an annual schedule of VP2 reviews for each post on the list. On behalf of the Under Secretary for Management, M/PRI will formally task all bureaus to begin each VP2 review at their appropriate time, according to the published schedule. M/PRI will also arrange a working-level kick-off meeting for each VP2, to identify any questions or concerns about the post under review at the very start of the process. Following the kick-off meeting, M/PRI will send a memo to the Assistant Secretaries of the Regional and Functional Bureaus explaining responsibilities and key dates. M/PRI plays an active role in the editing and redrafting process of VP2 discussion papers, affording analytical and editorial support to the regional bureau drafters. The Regional Bureau and Functional Bureaus must share information and work together to create a cohesive analysis and should expect several rounds of revision as mission, threat, mitigation measures, and resources are reviewed, refined, and gaps are analyzed.
- f. **Drafting the Paper:** After the Regional Bureau ensures that all sections of the VP2 discussion template form a complete narrative, the Regional Bureau should work with the Regional Bureau Assistant Secretary, Chief of Mission, Executive Director, and Country Desk Officer to provide a well-crafted presence recommendation to the Deputy Secretaries and Under Secretaries for Political Affairs and Management that states whether to begin, restart, continue, reconsider the personnel footprint, or discontinue operations at post. The VP2 process does not adjudicate individual staffing requests; rather, the overall personnel footprint should be considered with security and national objectives in mind. This recommendation should be based on the information gathered to complete the VP2 discussion template. The Regional Bureau, M/PRI, and other bureaus as necessary will conduct a technical review of the analysis before it is reviewed by the Core High Threat Post Review Board as discussed below.
- g. **Possible meeting with P and M:** Before an action memo with the VP2 discussion and final presence recommendation is forwarded to the Deputy Secretaries and the Under Secretaries for Political Affairs and Management for decision, the Under Secretaries for Political Affairs and Management must decide if they wish to meet the Core High Threat Post Review Board to review the VP2. This meeting must take place if consensus cannot be achieved at the assistant-secretary level, proposed actions are politically sensitive, or U.S. foreign policy interests are significant but contradictory or controversial. The Regional Bureaus and relevant Functional Bureaus have the responsibility to alert the Office of the Under Secretary for Political Affairs and the Office of the Under Secretary for Management about a lack of consensus or special concerns. The Board will be notified in writing by the Chair should such a meeting occur. Normally, such a meeting will not take place. Generally, the Core High-Threat Post Review Board will meet to discuss the VP2 paper before forwarding the final presence recommendation via decision memo through the Under Secretaries for Political Affairs and Management to the Deputy Secretaries.

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- h. **Core High Threat Post Review Board Review (Core HTPRB):** In the event that the Under Secretaries for Political Affairs and Management do not wish to meet with the Core HTPRB to review the discussion template, the Core HTPRB must convene to review and endorse the VP2 analysis and proposed presence recommendation before forwarding to the Under Secretaries for Political Affairs and Management for transmission to the Deputy Secretaries. The Core HTPRB is comprised of the DS Assistant Secretary (Chair), the Department's Executive Secretary, Crisis Management Support, INR, M/PRI, M and P executive assistants, D and D-MR staff, and principal deputy assistant secretaries and executive directors from all regional bureaus with a post currently on the HTHR post list. One of the responsibilities of all Regional Bureaus with a post on the HTHR list is to attend and participate at all HTPRB meetings, so that the Department may identify trends and best practices, regardless of whether the countries under discussion are in their region. VP2 analyses should be prepared in advance of a meeting to allow adequate time (at least 72 hours) for review. See 12 FAM 490 for information on the High Threat Post Review Board.
- i. **The Core HTPRB will review the VP2 discussion paper.**
 - (1) A VP2 analysis must articulate that the Department has
 - (a) Developed a defined, attainable, and prioritized mission based on U.S. national interests;
 - (b) Undertaken an assessment of the risks, and resources needed to mitigate said risks, to the maximum extent possible;
 - (c) Explicitly accepted those risks that cannot be mitigated;
 - (d) Developed recommended conditions for the U.S. government presence in this location, including an identification of residual risk and highlighting any gaps; and
 - (e) Weighed the needs of U.S. policy against the risks facing U.S. personnel, and considered whether adjustments to the U.S. presence must be made.
- j. **Summary of Conclusions:** Following the HTPRB meeting, M/PRI will send the conclusions reached at the meeting as well as next steps to all Board members.
- k. **Voting:** Board members "vote" by giving their clearances on the final memoranda to the Deputy Secretaries and Under Secretaries for Political Affairs and Management.
- l. **Recommendation to the Deputy Secretaries and Under Secretaries:**
 - (1) Using the VP2 analysis, the Regional Bureau must propose to the Deputy Secretaries and Under Secretaries for Political Affairs and Management whether to begin, restart, continue, reconsider the personnel footprint, or discontinue operations. **A recommendation must be agreed to by all parties, including the Regional Bureau, DS, OBO, INR, and other bureaus as appropriate.** The Deputy Secretaries of State will approve or

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disapprove a decision memo drafted by the Regional Bureau. If the Deputy Secretaries choose to begin, restart, reconsider the personnel footprint, or continue operations at a post, they must be prepared to accept the risks associated with operating in this location.

- (2) **Consulting with the National Security Council (NSC):** If appropriate, the Secretary or Deputy Secretaries may wish to discuss the decision with the NSC.
- (3) **Informing the Interagency:** If a decision is made to discontinue operations at a post, an announcement is sent via ExecSec to other agencies.

m. **Next Steps:** Before opening or re-opening high-risk, high-threat posts, the Department will establish a multi-bureau Support Cell, residing in the Regional Bureau. A standard operating procedure for Support Cells is located in 2 FAM 423. The Support Cell planning may take place concurrently with VP2 drafting.

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